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# Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships 1906-1921

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## 134 Naval War College Review

care less, but which is interesting. If you are a true lover of little-known naval detail, you should have these volumes. In that context, each is worth its rather impressive price.

RICHARD F. CROSS III  
Alexandria, Virginia

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Gardiner, Robert, ed. director.  
*Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships 1906-1921*. London, England: Conway Maritime Press, 1985. 439pp. \$39.95

This large book is one of a series of four reference works published over the past eight years by the Conway Maritime Press in Britain and marketed in the United States by the Naval Institute Press. This series follows a novel approach, providing a long overdue aid to the naval historian and student of warship history. These books are concise, in fact highly compressed encyclopedias of basic data on the major warships of the world's navies for the time period covered by each book. This latest volume in the series deals with World War I, the *Dreadnought*-building 'naval race' years that preceded that war, and the immediate aftermath; a very appropriate division. Earlier volumes have covered 1947-1982 (in fact, two volumes that together total 544pp., published 1983); 1922-1946 (456pp., published 1980); and 1860-1905 (440pp., published 1979).

The books' common format includes provision of ship lists by design class, with brief notes for construction dates and fate. Basic character-

istics given include displacement (normal and full load); dimensions; machinery (including speed and endurance); armor thicknesses; armament; and complement. Textual notes for larger ships add some background information on design concept, technical features of special interest, and occasionally, operational activities. Profile line drawings and small photographs are numerous, illustrating most of the ship classes from destroyer types upwards.

The novelty of this apparently straightforward approach is that most of the commonly available historical sources of warship data are riddled with errors or are incomplete. Most of these commonly used sources, contemporary "naval annuals," were published as guides to current fleet strength. This was the approach taken by all the great naval yearbooks, beginning with Brassey's *The Naval Annual* in 1886 and continued with *Jane's Fighting Ships*, *Les Flottes de Combat*, and Weyer's *Taschenbuch der Kriegsflootten* around the turn of the century. Any such description of contemporary naval strength has been constrained to some degree by restrictions upon the release of official information. At times these official sanctions have had extreme effect, such as in late-1930s' Germany, Italy, and Japan, and in the present-day Soviet Union. No one has ever gone back to redo one of these yearbooks using official data that became available perhaps twenty years later. The Conway series' *All the World's Fighting Fleets* attempts an analogous task, taking a 15- to 45-

year time span and describing all the principal vessels that were operational or planned during that time, using data subsequently available.

A second systemic problem in using "naval annuals" for historical data is that their focus on current strength usually precludes much mention of historical events. Ships lost in combat, units of a class scrapped or lost accidentally, or otherwise disposed of disappear from the book and sometimes go unaccounted for in the process. Accordingly, a 1946 *Jane's*, for example, said very little about the Axis fleets of World War II, most appearing only as war losses. Some war-built ships never appeared in the annuals at all.

Of course, an increasingly wide variety of detailed and accurate books on warship history have been appearing worldwide since about 1960. The late Dr. Oscar Parkes' *British Battleships* (1957) was the first great book of this kind. The avid student of warships can now find a weighty volume or detailed article on many of the most interesting ship types (books on battleships, cruisers, destroyers, etc.) or navies (books on all a given navy's ships).

Unfortunately, this wealth of information is limited on several counts. First, purchase of all these books would cost a huge sum of money and take an exorbitant amount of time merely to keep updated with new research appearing in magazines and other books. Second, gaps in coverage in published books remain. Third, language barriers effectively negate some of these books for most

Western readers.

Accordingly, the production of a new worldwide reference book, drawing on all this published work and additional research as necessary to produce a synopsis of key data seems to be an obvious need. Conway Maritime Press wisely sought to distribute the task of compiling such a work among various authors, each to have special expertise for the countries assigned. Several of the persons chosen, indeed, are recognized as leading authorities in their field, such as Erwin Sieche (Austria-Hungary); Gerhard Koop (Federal Republic of Germany 1947-1982 volume); Robert L. Scheina (South American navies); Aldo Fraccaroli (Italy); N.J.M. Campbell (German capital ships, 1906-1921); the late Karl-Erik Westerlund (Scandinavian navies); and Norman Friedman (U.S. Navy).

This series of books is not without flaws. France is not given justice in any of these books, and coverage of the Russian and Soviet fleets up to 1946 is unfortunate, despite the availability of data in Russian language sources. Coverage of Japan is disappointing, with no one working in Japanese language sources involved. Central American fleets are poorly covered; no use seems to have been made of the very good U.S. Navy Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) reports at the National Archives on those small forces, for example. Small craft and auxiliaries of most fleets are given short shrift or, in many cases, ignored.

There is virtually no discussion of sources anywhere in these books.

The reader is not told when authoritative, archival material is reflected and when recourse to contemporary books and magazines is necessary. At the least, it seems that each major chapter should have had a bibliographical note citing such cardinal sources as official ship lists (e.g., the U.S. Navy's *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* and the equivalent Dutch, Argentine, Italian, Brazilian, Greek, and other works), major scholarly books, etc.

Happily, the 1816-1859 volume that has been announced as in preparation has excellent choices of persons to prepare the critical United Kingdom and French sections, and the important Spanish section also is in very good hands. This forthcoming volume, expected in about a year, probably will be qualitatively the best of the lot—though the smaller number of ships being covered will give the authors some advantage despite the remoteness of the period in question. The editors at Conway's also have suggested that the 1860-1905 volume, the least well researched, is a candidate for revision and reissuance at some point in the future.

All in all, this set of books is indispensable for the serious student of warship history. What is most remarkable is that it took so long for such a useful series of books to be conceived.

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Whitley, M. J. *German Cruisers of World War II*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1985. 176pp. \$21.95

This handsomely illustrated and well-written book is a significant addition to the literature on the cruisers which fought in World War II. Written as a companion to the author's earlier *Destroyer!* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1983), *German Cruisers of World War II* covers the design of Germany's light and heavy cruisers and their wartime operations. In the first part of the book, the ships' designs are described and illustrated by a number of detailed drawings, and the German ships are compared with similar warships constructed by the other naval powers. The second, and longer part of the book is devoted to a history of German cruiser operations during the war, and most of the operational narrative focuses on missions in or from Norwegian waters.

The growing interest of the U.S. Navy in the Norwegian Sea makes Whitley's section on cruiser operations especially timely. The German Navy found that sailing in Norwegian and Arctic waters took a heavy toll of men and machines. The pounding of high waves, sea spray icing and cold, combined to damage sensitive radar equipment—usually at those times when poor visibility made radar essential. Spray and ice also drastically reduced the effectiveness of optical ranging equipment, sometimes forcing cruisers to fight at very close range with torpedo-armed destroyers. Finally, wave action and